

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq in Baghdad, Iraq

April 7, 2009

President Obama. Well, thank you very much. I'm just going to make a short statement. I've just had very productive discussions with Prime Minister Maliki. I'm glad that I could come back to Iraq. It's important for me to speak directly to the Prime Minister, as well as other Iraqi leaders. And it's obviously a great honor to pay tribute to our troops, our diplomats, as well as Iraqis who have fought side by side with Americans.

I've arrived in Baghdad a day after—around the bombings that killed many innocent Iraqi civilians. And our hearts go out to the victims of this senseless violence, as well as their families. But I remain convinced that our shared resolve and commitment to progress is greater than the obstacles that stand in our way.

But we should not be distracted, because we have made enormous progress working alongside the Iraqi Government over the last few months. Overall, violence continues to be down. There's been movement on important political questions. But we have been reminded that there's more work to do.

I communicated to the Prime Minister that we are strongly committed to an Iraq that is sovereign and stable and self-reliant. And as Prime Minister Maliki was already aware, we have committed ourselves to a strategy that ensures a orderly, responsible transition from U.S. and coalition security forces to Iraqi security forces.

I've made it clear to my commanders that we need to be flexible but focused on training and equipping Iraqi security forces so that they can take the lead in dealing with security threats in their country. And the drawdown that will take place will, ultimately, result in the removal of all U.S. troops by 2011.

The second point of discussion was to indicate that we strongly support political steps to be taken to resolve differences between various factions within Iraq and to ensure a more peaceful and prosperous future.

Again, we've seen very good progress, but going forward, it's absolutely critical that all Iraqis are fully integrated into the Government and the security forces. We also want to work with the Prime Minister to deliver basic services to the Iraqi people, and I know that's something that he cares deeply about. And finally, we discussed how important it is to work together to deal with some of the regional issues that, ultimately, will be important to Iraq's security.

I just came from Turkey, for example, which I think has been working much more effectively and cooperatively in dealing with issues in northern Iraq. And we want to continue to foster good relations not just with Turkey, but with all of the countries in the region.

So as we carry out this strategy, we'll be working closely not only with the Prime Minister and his Government but also with President Talabani and all of the other key Government leaders. We'll do so in a spirit of partnership. The U.S. pursues no claims on Iraqis' territory and resources. We respect Iraqi sovereignty and the sacrifices that you have made for your

country. And we seek a full transition to Iraqi responsibility for the security and prosperity of the nation.

The American people, through its troops, through civilians, have made enormous sacrifices here in Iraq. But they do so with the knowledge that they have stood alongside the Iraqi people in creating a more stable and prosperous country. And they are proud of the work that they've done, and I am proud and speak for them when I say that we want to continue to advance progress here in Iraq. And I look forward to the partnership with the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi people in making this happen.

Prime Minister Maliki. Thank you, Mr. Obama. I welcome you in Iraq, that you—that was a station after a very good trip for you. We discussed a lot of things regarding fixing a lot of the regional and international problems. The discussion with Mr. Obama included a lot of the bilateral issues that we insisted that he should continue to include all type of areas like scientific, social, et cetera. And we also committed to whatever had been achieved from democracy and the SOFA agreement.

We also talked about that dialog should be the only way to resolve any issue, whether it was between the Iraqi society components or in the region. We achieved a lot of things in Iraq now: the democratic process; we commit to our Constitution. We want to go forward to benefit the country in this direction.

We assured the President that all the progress that was made in the security area will continue so we will be able to continue our building effort, our progress in Iraq. Iraq that now is based on increased security and increased stability, look forward to international companies and to other countries to participate in investing in the country. The partnerships that were created and the agreements that were signed will be the base for the cooperation to improve our relationship.

I appreciate very much the call for dialog that President Obama mentioned, especially between East and West, between Islam and Christianity, and also work to solve the Palestinian issue that will help reduce violence in the area drastically. It will help in giving people their rights, also produce peace that we've been looking forward for a few years. We also thank President Obama for his willingness to help in the resolutions that were issued against Iraq in the previous period.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:28 p.m. at Camp Victory. Prime Minister Maliki spoke in Arabic, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Iraq :: Prime Minister Maliki.

Locations: Baghdad, Iraq.

Names: Maliki, Nuri al-; Talabani, Jalal.

Subjects: Iraq : Civilian casualties; Iraq : Infrastructure and economic development; Iraq : Insurgency and terrorist attacks; Iraq : Iraqi military and security forces; Iraq : President; Iraq : President Obama's visit; Iraq : Prime Minister; Iraq : Reconciliation efforts; Iraq : Reconstruction efforts; Iraq : Relations with Turkey; Iraq : Status of Forces Agreement with

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